

KABIR

A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND TEACHINGS



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KABIR.

FEW chapters in the history of Indian Religion have been so little studied as the one dealing with the great and wide spread Reformation, at once religious and social, that was inaugurated in mediæval India in the 15th and 16th centuries. The movement bears a striking resemblance to the similar movement of reform that set in in Europe during the same period. A number of intrepid and high-minded reformers arose—four being chief among them—who condemned in strong and fearless terms the idolatry and superstitious practices of the people. In their place a new religion of Love and Devout Worship was established. Social and caste distinctions were also strongly condemned by these reformers which, as a result, were greatly relaxed in some places, and in others, entirely abolished. The North Indian Vernaculars too received a great impetus from this movement and some of the greatest and most renowned works in those languages were the outcome of this Reformation.

The origin and doctrines of this Reformation are to be found, to a great extent, in the new Vaishnavite movement that had been started in South India by the two great Acharyas, Ramanuja and Madhwacharya. From the 8th century onwards, a distinct school of Vaishnavite worship was slowly growing in Southern India. The older Vaishnavism that had, under the Guptas, spread all over India, had here in the South fallen on good soil, and an indigenous school arose with a literature partly in the vernacular and partly in Sanskrit. The movement was silently growing and developing new lines of thought when on the top of the wave came Ramanuja himself with his doctrine of Love and Brotherhood and Vishishtadwaita Philosophy. A century and a half later, came Madhwacharya who, though his doctrines differed to some extent from those of Ramanuja, propounded similar concepts of God and inculcated the same religion of Love and Devout worship. These doctrines, fraught with a new faith and hope and significant of a new happiness and peace, should have had a warm and ready access to the heart of mediæval Hindusthan, oppressed, as it was, by political and social anarchy and sunk in the depths of religious decay.

From very ancient times, a close literary and spiritual intercourse has existed between Southern and Northern India. Monks and scholars have long carried and spread the thought and philosophy of one land to another. The new Vaishnavite doctrines, that were at this time vigorously preached in South India by Ramanuja and his followers and by Madhwacharya, were thus carried to the North by the monks and teachers of their respective orders. Notices of a number of these South Indian missionaries are to be found in the traditions and stories of Northern India. The chief of them was a Ramanujite monk of the 14th century whose name and memory is still invoked with great reverence and gratitude by many a North Indian sect. It was from him, Ramanand by name, that the founders of the two great sects of Modern Hinduism, Kabir and Nanak, derived their doctrines and their spiritual inspiration. Another, by name Madhavendra Puri, a monk of the Madhwacharya order, carried the new religion and learning to Bengal and one of his disciples imparted the new religion to Chaitanya who was soon to become the founder of a great school of Vaishnavism in Bengal and Orissa. The new religion spread to Rajasthan and Guzerat

where a great Vaishnavite Church was founded by a South Indian monk which still holds its sway over millions of their people. Maharashtra too, where the banner of the new movement was early raised by a remarkable Brahmin youth, should have received many of its doctrines and ideas from the South, though we do not meet with any recorded notices of South Indian monks and teachers in the Marathi literature relating to this movement. The advent of these South Indian monks resulted in a general awakening and the spread of Vaishnavite doctrines throughout Northern India. The four great Reformers—Chaitanya (Bengal) Dnyandev (Maharashtra), Kabir (Central India) and Nanak (the Punjab)—though there were great individual differences between them—adopted and preached broadcast the new Vaishnavite doctrines and helped to bring about a great Reformation in religion and social ideals.

In the reformers of Central and Northern India—Kabir and Nanak—we find a new element working in addition to the Vaishnavite ideas of the South. In spite of the aloofness and hatred which characterised early Mahomedan rule, Mahomedan thought and literature were slowly

making themselves felt on the mind of the people of Hindusthan. The poetry of Hafiz and Sufi, of Jalaludin Rumi and Faruddin Attar, was eagerly read by the cultured among the Hindus. Celebrated Sufis, too, like the Mullah Shah of Lahore, were going about preaching their doctrines, taking disciples and initiating them into their mystic rites. Mahomedan Sufism bore a remarkable resemblance to the Vaishnavism that was now spreading in Northern India. With its doctrine of the identity of God and soul, with its mystic and contemplative exercises, with its strange disregard of ceremonial rules and practices, it could not but have affected to a great degree the rising Vaishnavism of Central and Northern India. But, in spite of its Mahomedan influences, the religion of Kabir and Nanak still remains a most characteristic survival of Medieval Vaishnavism.

Among the four great medieval reformers (the biography of one of whom—Chaitanya—has already been published in this series), Kabir, the subject of this sketch, is a remarkable character in many ways. His great courage and spirit of protestantism, his supreme love and kindness to all, his fearless yet humble advocacy of pure and

ennobling doctrines, above all, his profound mystic poems and utterances, make him a most eminent figure in this mediæval movement.

KABIR'S BIRTH AND PARENTAGE.

The date of Kabir's birth is a subject of great uncertainty, the most probable one (supported by an authentic verse) being 1440 A D. Many a legend is told as to his birth and parentage on none of which reliance can be placed. He was found, says a legend, lying as a child in the lake called Lahar Talao near Benares, on a blossoming water lily, Niru, a childless Mahomedan weaver, saw it, took it home and adopted it as his child. A Kazi was in due time called to give the child a name; the Koran was opened and a lot was cast. The word *Kabir* which means "great" in the Arabic language was the first that presented itself and the name was accordingly given to the child. All legends considered, Kabir seems to have been of Hindu parentage, though adopted and brought up as a Mahomedan.

We know very little of Kabir's early training, of the way in which his spiritual genius was kindled. That he was for a long time without a guru or teacher can be said with certainty. He, however, seems to have been of a reflective and

intrepid disposition. He often surprised his parents and neighbours by his queer acts of love and charity and even occasional sallies of free-thought. But in spite of his mystic moods and utterances he followed his trade, and, at the same time, received and served holy men and mendicants.

RAMANAND, THE SOUTH INDIAN MONK

Kabir for a long time remained without a teacher. This was the time when the fame of the South Indian preacher and monk Ramanand was at its height in Benares. We have already referred to him, but it would be proper for us, to give here a fuller account of this Vaishnavite teacher, as it was, by sitting at his feet and by joining in his discourses and teaching, that Kabir learnt his characteristic doctrines and religion. Ramanand was born at Melkote (Malabar Coast, South India) where Ramanuja had once taken refuge and established his Vaishnavite faith. More than two centuries have passed and his Vaishnavism should have, therefore, been in full swing at the time of Ramanand's birth in that place. Ramanand was instructed in the new creed by one Ragunanand, a Vaishnavite scholar. Ramanand served the guru for

some time and then went on a pilgrimage to the sacred places of Northern India. In the course of his wanderings, he visited Benares and there lived at the ghat called *Panchganga* where his sandals were preserved at the time of the Vaishnavi chronicler, Nabhaji.

During his travels, Ramanand seems to have freely mingled with teachers of other creeds and formed new ideas on religion and social observances. When he returned home, his co-religionists and those who had previously lived with him interrogated him as to his observance of caste-rules since his departure from them. It was found that his theological belief had altered in some respects and that he had relaxed the severe caste-rules of the orthodox order. His brethren of the order expelled him, but his guru appears to have felt some sympathy with him, for he authorised him to found a sect of his own which he accordingly did.

Ramanand went to Benares and there began to gather disciples with whom he often held discourses on religious topics. The philosophical and theological tenets of the new faith, he preached, corresponded to a great extent to those of Ramanuja, but he added to them

a new gospel of freedom, of religious and social equality. He laid down as a rule that all persons of any caste who accepted the tenets and principles of his sect, might eat and drink together irrespective of birth. All men who serve God are equal. He thus threw his spiritual door wide open, admitted disciples of all castes, and boldly announced that jar or knowledge of God emancipated men from all bondage. He called his disciples the Liberated (*i. v. chuta*), as he allowed them, and they accepted, a liberal interpretation of Hindu social rules sanctioned by religion. At the same time, it may be noted, Ramanand vehemently opposed atheists and those who boasted that they existed independently of God. The following hymn of Ramanand occurring in the *Adi Granth* reveals his characteristic mysticism and simplicity —

Whither shall I go? I am happy at home,
 My heart will not go with me, it hath become a
 cripple
 One day I did have an inclination to go,
 I ground sandal, took distilled aloo wood and many
 perfumes,
 And was proceeding to worship God in a temple,
 When my guru showed me God in my heart

Wherever I go, I find only water or stones,
 But Thou O God 'art equally contained in every-
 thing
 The Vedas and the Puranas all have I seen and
 searched.
 Go then thither, if God be not here

O True Guru, I am a sacrifice unto Thee,
 Who hast cut away all my perplexities and doubts
 Ramanand's Lord is the All Pervading God
 The Guru's word cutteth away millions of sins
 (Macauliffe's *Sikhism*)

KABIR'S MEETING WITH RAMANAND

Kabir seems to have long desired to sit at the feet of Ramanand but, being a Mahomedan, doubted whether he would be admitted to discipleship. At last, he hit upon a very characteristic step which is narrated with great detail in his biographies. One day rising early morning, he went and hid himself on the river steps of the Ganges ghāt down which Ramanand used to go to his bath in the river. As Ramanand came, he unknowingly trod on Kabir's head and exclaimed in his astonishment 'Ram' 'Ram' Kabir, at once rising up, fell at his feet and said "Thou hast given me the word of initiation and I am become thy disciple" Ramanand, struck with the sincerity of Kabir, accepted him. Kabir ever after

seems to have remained the disciple of Ramanand, joining him in the theological and philosophical disputes which he carried on with the learned of the day.

During the course of this life in the company of Ramanand occurred an interesting incident which throws a curious light on the peculiarly mystic bent and deep spiritual earnestness of Kabir's mind. A renowned Brahmin disputant, by name Sarrajit, arrived at Benares. The pundits of Benares informed Ramanand of his arrival and told him that no one could cope in argument with the new come pundit. Ramanand, however, set Kabir to argue with him. The pundit, on seeing him, inquired his caste whereupon Kabir answered that he was a weaver. The haughty pundit turned up his nose and asked what a weaver was. Kabir replied —

No one knoweth the secret of the Weaver,

God hath woven the warp of the whole World,

If thou listen to the Vedas and the Puranas,

Thou shalt hear, 'I have stretched the warp so
[long,

I have made the Earth and Firmament my work shop

I have set the Sun and the Moon in alternate motion,

Working my legs I did one work'—with such a

Weaver my heart is pleased,

The weaver hath looked into his own heart and
 there recognised God
 Saith Kabir, 'I have broken up my workshop,'
 And the weaver hath blended his thread with the
 thread of God
 Macauliffe's *Si'ahim*)

KABIR'S LIFE

Though some traditions try to conceal it, the fact is well proved that Kabir was a married man and the father of a family. As Evelyn Underhill puts it —

It is clear that he never adopted the life of the professional ascetic or retired from the world in order to devote himself to bodily mortifications and the exclusive pursuit of the contemplative life. Side by side with his interior life of adoration, its artistic expression in music and words—for he was a skilled musician as well as a poet—he lived the sane and diligent life of the Oriental craftsman. All the legends agree on this point that Kabir was a weaver, a simple and unlettered man, who earned his living at the loom. Like Paul the tent-maker, Bohme the cobbler, Bunyan the tinker, Tersteegen the ribbon maker, he knew how to combine vision and industry, the work of his hands helped rather than hindered the impassioned meditation of his heart. Hating more bodily austerities, he was no ascetic, but a married man, the father of a family—a circumstance which Hindu legends of the monastic type vainly attempt to conceal or explain—and it was from out of the heart

of the common life that he sang his rapturous lyrics of divine love. Here his works corroborate the traditional story of his life. Again and again he extols the life of home, the value and reality of diurnal existence, with its opportunities for love and renunciation, pouring contempt upon the professional sanctity of the yogi ' who has a great beard and matted locks, and looks like a goat, and on all who think it necessary to flee a world pervaded by love, joy and beauty—the proper theatre of man's quest—in order to find that One Reality ' who has spread His form of love throughout all the world '.

KABIR IS A PREACHER

His discipleship over, Kabir set himself to preach the doctrines he had learnt to whoso would listen to him. He soon became the centre of a large number of disciples who began to gather round him at the loom or in the market-place to listen to his songs and discourses. But, preaching as he did in the city of Benares, the very centre of orthodox Hinduism, his strange mystic doctrines, his denunciation of theological beliefs and ceremonial rites brought down the opposition of the learned and the orthodox on him,

O servant, where dost thou seek Me ?

Lo ! I am beside Thee

I am neither in temple nor in mosque

I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash

Neither am I in rites and ceremonies,

Nor in yoga and renunciation

If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see Me
thou shalt meet me in a moment of time

Kabir says O Sadhu! God is the breath of all
breath

There is nothing but water at the holy bathing
places, and I know that they are useless, for I have
bathed in them

The images are all lifeless, they cannot speak, I
know, for I have cried aloud to them

The Purana and the Koran are mere words, lifting up
the curtain, I have seen

Kabir gives utterance to two words of experience,
and he knows very well that all other things are
untrue

(Rabindranath Tagore's *A Hundred Poems of Kabir*)

Long not for a dwelling in Heaven and fear not to dwell
in Hell,

What will be, will be, O my soul, hope not at all
Sing the praises of God from whom the supreme reward
is obtained,

What is devotion, what penance and austerities, what
fastings and ablutions,

Unless thou know the way to love and serve God.

Be not glad at the sight of prosperity and grieve not at
the sight of adversity,

As is prosperity, so is adversity, What God proposeth
shall be accomplished.

Saith Kabir "Through th^e saints, I now know in my heart,

That the worshipper, in whose heart God dwelleth performeth the best worship "

If God dwell only in the mosque, to whom belongeth the rest of the country ?

They who are called Hindus say that God dwelleth in an idol , I see not truth in either sect

O God, whether Allah or Ram, I live by Thy name,

O Lord, show kindness unto me

Harī dwelleth in the south, Allah hath his place in the west.

Search in Thy heart, search in the heart of hearts, there is His place and abode

(Macauliffe's *Sikhism*)

PERSECUTION

The opposition of the orthodox soon manifested itself in hatred and ill-will. Of the many legends of the persecution that befell Kabir, a few are characteristic and deserve notice. A young and beautiful courtesan was sent to tempt Kabir, " but like the Magdalen of Biblical story, she was converted by her sudden encounter with the initiate of a higher Love " Another time, Kabir was hauled up before the Mahomedan Emperor Sikandar Lodi on a complaint of leading the people

astray with false doctrines Kabir went and stood before the Emperor and the courtiers told him to make obeisance to the monarch Kabir replied that he was not accustomed to courts and did not know how to make prostrations, nor, he added, had he any business with the emperor, he but knew the name of God who was the Support of his soul and the Only Sovereign of the world The Emperor came to have been at first provoked to anger but, being a man of culture and knowing that Sufis of his sect were always allowed a little freedom, at last let him go in peace

to Maghar in the Samvat year 1575 (1518 A. D.) On the eleventh day of the bright half of the month of Maghar, *his spirit blended with the spirit of the world* " All India knows the beautiful legend of Kabir's death, how both Hindus and Mahomedans fought for his corpse which the one wanted to burn and the other to bury, how at last Kabir himself appeared before them in person and asked them to lift the shroud and look beneath. In the place of the corpse, to their great astonishment they found a heap of flowers half of which was buried by the Mahomedans at Gorakhpur and half taken by the Hindus to Benares and burnt—'fitting conclusion," says the author already quoted, "to a life which had made fragrant the doctrines of two great creeds." The following poem composed by Kabir on the death of a saint—friend of his might well have been uttered at his own death —

Not a drop now trickleth from the citadel of thy brain—where is the music that filled it ?

The great saint hath departed with the name of the Supreme Being, the Supreme God

O Father, whither hath departed the soul which dwelt with thy body ?

Which revelle'd in divine knowledge, expounded and preached ?

Whither hath the player gone who played the drum of thy body ?

Thy tales, thy words, thy divine instruction are no longer heard, all thy vital energy hath been drawn away, the ten breaths which kept thee together have escaped. Thou art dead, thou hast left thy friends and relatives,

Sayeth Kabir. He who meditateth on God bursteth his bonds even when alive !

(Macauliffe's *Sikhism*.)

PAINTINGS OF KABIR

The visitor to Kabir's mutt at Benares is shown what purports to be his picture. Dharm Das, his chief disciple, and Shrutagopal are represented kneeling at his feet in an attitude of supplication while his son, Kamal, is seen fanning him. The visitor may also see a picture of Kabir and Ravi Das, a friend and fellow-disciple and townsman of his. Ravi Das appears in the picture as a very attenuated old man, naked except for a red cloth round his middle, wearing a rosary in two folds round his neck and beads on wrist and arms. His royal disciple, Jhaji, queen of Chitoor, is also seen richly dressed offering him food on a platter.

KABIR'S RELIGION AND POETRY

The main doctrines of Kabir's creed were, as might have been seen already, based on the current

Vaishnavite philosophy and religion. In his hands, however, those doctrines were purged of all theological obscurity and reasoning and propounded with a beauty and mystic poetry unrivalled in that mediæval epoch. We have in the previous sketches dealt in detail with the several doctrines of the mediæval Vaishnavite reformers and our aim in this sketch, therefore, will be to give a few poems of Kabir and refer them to those various concepts and doctrines.

Speaking of Kabir's concept of God, Evelyn Underhill says —

These (Kabir and other mystics) have resolved the perpetual opposition between the personal and impersonal, the transcendent and immanent, static and dynamic aspects of the Divine Nature, between the Absolute of philosophy and the "sure, true Friend" of devotional religion. They have done this, not by taking these apparently incompatible aspects one after the other, but by ascending to a height of spiritual intuition at which they are, as Ruysbroeck said, "melted and merged in the Unity," and perceived as the completing opposites of a Perfect Whole. God is here felt to be not the final abstraction, but the one actuality. He inspires, supports, indeed inhabits, both the durational, conditional, finite world of Becoming and the unconditioned, non-successional, infinite world of Being, yet utterly transcends them both. He is the

Omnipresent Reality, the "All-Pervading" within, whom "the worlds' are being told like beads" In His personal aspect, He is the "beloved Fakir" teaching and companioning each soul Considered as Immanent Spirit, He is "the mind within the mind" .

The need felt by Kabir for both these ways of describing Reality is a proof of the richness and balance of his spiritual experience, which neither cosmic nor anthropomorphic symbols, taken alone, could express. More absolute than the Absolute, more personal than the human mind, Brahma therefore exceeds whilst He includes all the concepts of philosophy, all the passionate intuitions of the heart He is the great Affirmation, the fount of energy, the source of life and love, the unique satisfaction of desire His creative word is the *Om* or "Everlasting yea" The negative philosophy, which strips from the Divine Nature all its attributes and—defining Him only by that which He is not—reduces Him to an "Emptiness" is abhorrent to this most vital of poets Brahma, he says, "may never be found in abstractions" He is the One love who pervades the world, discerned in His fullness only by the eyes of love, and those who know Him thus share, though they may never tell, the joyous and ineffable secret of the Universe

The following poems,hapsodical and sublime, contain Kabir's vision of Godhead —

The light of the sun, the moon, and the stars shine bright,

The melody of love swells forth, and the rhythm of love's detachment beats the time

Day and night the chorus of music fills the heavens, and Kabir says, " My Beloved One glows like the lightning flash in the sky ?

Do you know how the moments perform their adoration ?

Waving its row of lamps, the Universe sings in worship day and night

There are the hidden banner and the secret canopy
There the sound of the unseen bells is heard

Kabir says There adoration never ceases, there the Lord of the Universe sitteth on His Throne.

The whole world does its works and commits its errors, but few are the lovers who know the Beloved

The devout seeker is he who mingles in his heart the double currents of love and detachment, like the mingling of the streams of Ganges and Jumna,

In his heart the sacred water flows day and night, and thus the round of births and deaths is brought to an end

Behold what wonderful rest is in the Supreme Spirit and he enjoys it who makes himself meet for it

Hold by the cords of love, the swing of the Ocean of Joy sways to and fro, and a mighty sound breaks forth in song

See what a lotus blooms there without water, and Kabir says " My heart's bee drinks its nectar "

What a wonderful lotus it is, that blooms at the heart of the spinning wheel of the Universe ! Only a few pure souls know of its pure delight

Musio is all around, and there the heart partakes of the joy of the Infinite Sea.

Kabir says "Dive thou into that Ocean of sweetness thus let all errors of life and of death flee away "

Behold how the thirst of the five senses is quenched there ! and the three forms of misery are no more !

Kabir says "It is the sport of the Unattainable One; look within and behold how the moonbeams of that Hidden One shine in you "

They have sung of Him as infinite and unattainable : but I in my meditations have seen Him without sight

What a frenzy of ecstasy there is in every hour ! and the worshipper is pressing out and drinking the essence of the hours he lives in the life of Brahma

I speak truth, for I have accepted truth in life , I am now attached to truth, I have swept all tinsel away

The inward and the outward are become as one sky, the Infinite and the Finite are united I am drunken with the sight of this All !

This light of Thine fulfils the Universe the Lamp of Love that burns on the salver of knowledge

Kabir says "There error cannot enter, and the conflict of life and death is felt no more "

Open your eyes of love, and see Him who pervades
this world ! consider it well, and know that this is your
own country

When you meet the true Guru, He will awaken your
heart,

He will tell you the secret of love and detachment,
and then you will know indeed that He transcends this
universe

He is the Ultimate Rest unbounded

He has spread His form of love throughout all the
world.

From that Ray which is Truth, streams of new form
are perpetually springing and He pervades those forms

All the gardens and groves and bowers are abounding
with blossom, and the air breaks forth into ripples of
joy

There the swan plays a wonderful game

There the unstruck music eddies around the Infinite
One

There in the midst the Throne of the unbeld
shining, whereon the Great Being sits—

Millions of suns are shamed by the radiance of a
single hair of His body

On the harp of the road what true melodies are being
sounded ! and its notes pierce the heart

There the Eternal Fountain is playing its endless life-
stream of birth and death

They call Him Emptiness who is the Truth of Truths
in whom all truths are stored !

(Rabindranath Tagore's *A Hundred Poems of Kabir*)

God constructed an inaccessible fortress for His residence
 Which He illuminated with His light
 The lightning playeth and pleasure reigneth
 Where the Youthful Lord God repositeth.
 If the soul love God's name,
 Man shall be released from old age and death and his
 doubts shall flee away

The sound of the unbeaten music is heard
 Where the Lord God repositeth
 He who fashioned continents and different countries,
 The three worlds, the three gods and the three qualities,
 Though *styled* Inaccessible and Invisible, dwelleth within
 the heart
 None can find the limit, or the secret of the Sustainer of
 the Earth,
 He shineth in the pliant blossom and in the sunshine,
 And hath taken His dwelling in the pollen of the lotus
 God's *spell* is within the *twelve petals of the heart*
 Where the Holy Lord God repositeth

(Macauliffe's *Sikhism*),

The conception of God as the One Great Love is
 the characteristic and most important feature of
 the medieval religion. Kabir, born poet as he
 was, realised and gave expression to this faith
 more vividly than any other medieval mystic. As
 the English critic already quoted says —

For the mere intellectualist as for the mere pietist, he
 (Kabir) has little approbation. Love is throughout His

"absolute sole Lord " the unique source of the more abundant life which he enjoys and the common factor which unites the finite and infinite worlds. All is soaked in love, that love which he described in almost Johannine language as the "Form of God". The whole of creation is the play of the Eternal Lover, the living, changing, growing expression of Brahma's love and joy. As these twin passions preside over the generation of human life, so "beyond the mists of pleasure and pain" Kabir finds them governing the creative acts of God. His manifestation is love, His activity is joy. Creation springs from one glad act of affirmation—the Everlasting Yea, perpetually uttered within the depths of the Divine Nature. In accordance with this concept of the universe as a Love-Game which eternally goes forward, a progressive manifestation of Brahma—one of the many notions which he adopted from the common stock of Hindu religious ideas, and illuminated by his poetic genius—movement, rhythm, perpetual change forms an integral part of Kabir's vision of Reality.

All things are created by the Om
 The love form is His body
 He is without form, without quality, without decay
 Seek thou union with Him
 But that formless God takes a thousand forms in
 the eyes of his creatures
 He is pure and indestructible
 His form is infinite and fathomless
 He dances in rapture and waves of form arise from
 His dance

The body and the mind cannot contain themselves
when they are touched by His great joy

He is immersed in all consciousness, all joys, and all
sorrows ,

He has no beginning and no end ,

He holds all within His bliss

Hark to the unstruck bells and drums !

Take your delight in love !

Rains pour down without water, and the rivers are
streams of light

One Love it is that pervades the whole world, few
there are who know it fully

They are blind who hope to see it by the light of
reason, that reason which is the cause of separation—

The House of Reason is very far away !

How blessed is Kabir, that amidst this great Joy he
sings within his own vessel

It is the music of the meeting of soul with soul

It is the music of the forgetting of sorrows,

It is the music that transcends all coming in and
all going forth

Dance my heart ! dance to day with joy

The strains of love fill the days and the nights with
music and the world is listening to its melodies

Mad with joy, life and death dance to the rhythm
of this music The hills and the sea and the earth
dance The world of man dances in laughter and tears

Why put on the robe of the monk, and live aloof from
the world in lonely pride ?

Behold ' my heart dances in the delight of a hundred
acts , and the Creator is well pleased

(Rabindranath Tagore's *A Hundred Poems of Kabir*)

God abideth in the heaven above, in the Earth beneath
and in every direction

The supreme Being is over the Root of joy , the body
may perish but God shall not

The Earth bloometh, the Firmament rejoiceth ,

Every heart is gladdened by God's sight,

The Lord God rejoiceth in endless ways ,

Whithersoever I look , there is He contained

The four Vedas rejoice in worldliness

So do the Smritis with the books of the Mussulmans

Shiva practising *yon* rejoiceth

Kabir's Lord bloometh equally in all things

(Macauliffe's *Sikhism*)

A cardinal doctrine of the medieval Vaishnavas
was the dualistic relation of God and soul

For the thorough-going Monist the soul, in so far
as it is real, is substantially identical with God, and the
true object of existence is the making patent of this
latent identity, the realisation which finds expression in
the Vedantist formula 'That art thou' But Kabir
says that Brahma and the creature are "ever distinct
yet ever united," that the wise man knows the spiritual
as well as the material world to "be no more than His
footstool " The soul's union with him is a love union,
a mutual inhabitation , that essentially dualistic relation
which all mystical religion expresses , not a self-

morgence which leaves no place for personality. This eternal distinction, the mysterious union in separateness of God and the soul, is a necessary doctrine of all sane mysticism, for no scheme which fails to find a place for it can represent more than a fragment of that soul's intercourse with the spiritual world. Its affirmation was one of the distinguishing features of the Vaishnavite reformation preached by Ramanuja, the principle of which had descended through Ramanda to Kabir.

The following poem expresses the doctrine —

When He Himself reveals Himself, Brahma brings into manifestation that which can never be seen

As the seed is in the plant, as the shade is in the tree,
as the void is in the sky, as infinite forms are in the void,

So from beyond the Infinite, the Infinite comes, and from the Infinite the Limit extends

The creature is in Brahma and Brahma is in the creature. They are ever distinct, yet ever united

He himself is the tree, the seed and the germ

He Himself is the flower, the fruit and the shade

He Himself is the sun, the light and the lighted

He Himself is Brahma, Creature and Maya

He Himself is the manifold form, the infinite space,

He is the breath, the word and the meaning

He Himself is the limit and the limitless and beyond both the limited and the limitless is He, the Pure Being,

He is the Immanent Atm in Brahma and the creature

The Supreme Soul is seen within the soul,
 The point is seen within the Supreme Soul,
 And within the Point, the reflection is seen again.
 Kabir is blest because he has this supreme vision !

(Rabindranath Tagore's *A Hundred Poems of Kabir*)

The path of attaining God who is all Love and
 joy lies not through ceremonies or rites or wor-
 ship A God who is all love can be worshipped
 only in love Kabir says in a remarkable
 poem —

O sadhu ! the simple union is the best

Since the day when I met my Lord, there has been no
 end to the sport of our love

I shut not my eyes, I close not my ears, I do not
 mortify my body ,

I see with eyes open and smile, and behold His beauty
 everywhere

I utter His Name, and whatever I see reminds me of
 Him whatever I do, it becomes His worship The rising
 and the setting are one to me all contradictions are
 solved Wherever I go, I move round Him, all I achieve
 is His service

When I lie down, I lie prostrate at His feet

He is the only Adorable one to me, I have none other.

My tongue has left off impure words, it sings His
 glory day and night

Whether I rise or sit down, I can never forget Him
 for the rhythm of His music beats in my ears

Kabir says "My heart is frozen, and I disclose in my soul what is hidden I am immersed in that One great Bliss which transcends all pleasure and pain"

This "simple union," this worship in love and in faith, is the theme of many an impressioned and beautiful poem of Kabir In varied metaphors drawn from Indian life and poetry—the migrant swan, the lotus, the bridegroom and the bride—he describes the yearning and love for God The tenderness and poetry and the rich imagery of these poems are unmatched in Indian literature —

To Thee, thou hast drawn my love, O Fakir'

I was sleeping in my own chamber and Thou didst awaken me, striking me with Thy voice O Fakir,

I was drowning in the deeps of the ocean of this world, and Thou didst save me upholding me with Thine arm, O Fakir'

Only one word and no second and Thou hast made me tear off all my bonds, O Fakir' Kabir says, "Thou hast united Thy heart to my heart, O Fakir"

"Dear friend, I am eager to meet my Beloved' my youth has flowered, and the pain of separation from Him troubles my breast

I am wandering yet in the alleys of knowledge without purpose, but I have received His news in these alleys of knowledge

I have a letter from my Beloved in this letter is an unutterable message, and now my fear of death is done away

Kabir says 'O my loving friend' I have got for my gift the Deathless One'

This day is dear to me above all other days, for to-day the Beloved Lord is a guest in my house,

My chamber and my courtyard are beautiful with His presence

My longings sing His Name, and they are become lost in His great beauty I wash His feet, and I look upon His Face and I lay before Him as an offering my body, my mind and all that I have

What a day of gladness is that day in which my Beloved, who is my treasure, comes to my house! All evils fly from my heart when I see my Lord

'My love has touched Him, my heart is longing for the Name which is Truth'

Thus sings Kabir, the servant of all servants

I hear the melody of His flute, and I cannot contain myself

The flower blooms, though it is not spring, and already the bee has received its invitation

The sky roars and the lightning flashes, the waves rise in my heart,

The rain falls, and my heart longs for my Lord

Where the rhythm of the world rises and falls thither my heart has reached

There the hidden banners are fluttering in the air

Kabir says my heart is dying though it lives

I played day and night with my comrades, and now I am greatly afraid

The Sovereign God hath come to my house as my
Husband

I made the bridal pavilion in the lotus of my heart, and
divine knowledge the recitation of my lineage

I obtained God as my Bridegroom, so great hath been my
good fortune

Demigods, men, saints and the thirty three crores of Gods
in their chariots came as spectators

Saith Kabir "The one God, the Divine Male, hath wed
and taken me with Him"

(Macauliffe's *Sikhism*)

Some more poems, embodying the intense love
and mysticism of Kabir may be quoted here —

How could the love between Thee and me sever?

As the leaf of the lotus abides on the water so Thou
art my Lord and I am Thy servant

As the night-bird chakor gazes all night at the moon,
so Thou art my Lord and I am Thy servant

From the beginning until the ending of time, there is
love between Thee and me, and how shall such love be
extinguished?

Kabir says 'As the river enters into the ocean, so my
heart touches Thee'

More than all else do I cherish at heart that love
which makes me to live a human life in this world.

It is like the lotus, which lives in the water and blooms
in the water yet the water cannot touch its petals, these
open beyond its reach

It is like a wife who enters the fire at the bidding of love. She burns and lets others grieve, yet never dishonours love.

(Rabindranath Tagore's *A Hundred Poems of Kabir*)

Though I have assumed many shapes, this is my last.
The strings and wires of the musical instrument are all
worn out, I am now in the power of God's name,
I shall not have again to dance to the tune of birth and
death,

Nor shall my heart accompany on the drum.
I have taken and destroyed my bodily lust and anger,
Lust's raiment hath grown old, and all my doubts are
dispelled.

I recognise one God in all creatures. Vain wranglings on
this subject are at an end.

Saith Kabir 'When God was gracious unto me, I
obtained Him the Perfect one.'

Turning away from the world I have forgotten both caste
and lineage,

My weaving is now in the Infinite Silence.

I have now no quarrel with any one,

I have given up both the Pundits and the Mullahs.

I weave clothes and wear them myself,

Where I see no pride, there I sing God's praises.

What the Pundits and Mullahs prescribed for me,

I have received no advantage from and have abandoned.

My heart being pure, I have seen the Lord,

Kabir having searched and searched himself, hath found
God within him.

(Macauliffe's *Sikhism*)

KABIR'S WORKS

The works of Kabir, from which the poems quoted above have been extracted and translated by various writers, are of a numerous and varied character. They are mostly however collections of songs composed in the various metres of old Hindi. An exhaustive list of Kabir's works, as contained in the collection known as *Khas Grantha* or the *Book*, preserved at Kabir's *chaura* in Benares, is given by Wilson in his 'Religion of the Hindus' (Vol 1 p 76). The chief and celebrated works are the *Byah*, the *Sukhnidhan* and a number of collections called *Sabdas*, *Sakhis*, *Rekhtas*, *Mangal*, *Vasant*, *Holi* etc, "there are also a variety of stanzas, called *Agams* etc, composing a very formidable course of study to those who wish to go deep into the doctrines of this school and one in which the greatest proficients amongst the Kabirpanthis are but imperfectly versed. A few *Sakhis*, *Sabdas*, *rekhtas*, with the greater portion of the *Byah*, constitute their acquirements."

The author or compiler of *Byah* was Bhagodas, one of Kabir's immediate disciples, it is the great authority on all the religious matters and doctrine among the Kabirpanthis in general. "It is written in very harmonious verse and with great

ingenuity of illustration, its style however is more dogmatical than argumentative and it rather inveighs against other systems than explains its own." *Sukhnidhan* is more venerated as it is taught only to those pupils whose studies are considered to approach perfection. Wilson considers *Sukhnidhan* as being exceedingly clear and intelligible. In these reputed works and collections of Kabir, there appear to be numerous stanzas and poems which perhaps were not written or composed by Kabir. Recently one or two critical editions of Kabir's works have appeared.

KABIRPANTHS

Though Kabir never aimed at founding a sect, but, like all true mystics and reformers, only tried to instil into men true faith and knowledge of God, his followers soon formed themselves into a sect. In spite of their smallness in numbers and their sectarian character, these Kabirpanthis still preserve vestiges of their original founder and his teaching, and the following account given by Wilson in his "Religion of the Hindus" of the religion and present condition of the Kabirpanthis may be read with interest —

Though the *Kabir Panthis* have withdrawn, in such a very essential point as worship, from the Hindu com-

munion, they still preserve abundant vestiges of their primitive source, and their notions are in substance the same as those of the Puranic sects, especially of the Vaishnava division. They admit of but one God, the creator of the world, and in opposition to the Vedanta notions of the absence of every quality and form, they assert that He has a body formed of the five elements of matter and that he has mind endowed with the three *gunas* or qualities of being, of course, of ineffable purity and irresistible power. He is free from the defects of human nature. In all other respects, He does not differ from man and the *pure man*, the *sadh* of the Kabir sect, is His living resemblance and after death is His associate and equal. He is eternal, without end or beginning. God and man are not only the same but that they are both in the same manner everything that lives and moves and has its being. Other sects have adopted these phrases literally, but the followers of Kabir do not mean by them to deny the individuality of being and only intend these texts as assertions of all nature originally partcipating in common elementary principles.

It is no part of their faith to worship any Hindu deity or to observe any of the rites or ceremonies of the Hindus, whether orthodox or schismatical, such of their members as are living in the world conform outwardly to all the usages of their tribe and caste and some of them even pretend to worship the usual divinities. Those, however, who have abandoned the fetters of society abstain from all the ordinary practices and address their homage chiefly in chanting hymns exclusively to the invisible Kabir. they use no *mantra* nor fixed form of

salutation they have no peculiar mode of dress . . the frontal marks, if worn, are usually those of the Vaishnava sects or they make a streak with sandal or gopichandan along the ridge of the nose, a necklace and rosary of *tulsi* are also worn by them

The moral code of *Kabirpanthis* is short, but, if observed faithfully, is of a rather favourable tendency. Life is the gift of God and must not, therefore, be violated by His creatures. Humanity is consequently a cardinal virtue and the shedding of blood whether of man or animal, a heinous crime. Truth is the other great principle of their code.

Retirement from the world is desirable . . The last great point is the usual aim and substance of every sect amongst the Hindus—implicit devotion in word, act and thought to the *Guru*. In this, however, the characteristic spirit of the *Kabirpanthis* appears, and the pupil is enjoined to scrutinize the teacher's doctrines and acts, to be first satisfied that he is the sage that he pretends to be, before he resigns himself to his control. This sect is, indeed, remarkably liberal in this respect, and the most frequently recurring texts of Kabir are those which enforce an attentive examination of the doctrine that he offers to his disciples. The chief of each community has absolute authority over his dependents, too only punishments he can award, however, are moral, not physical.

There is no doubt that the *Kabirpanthis*, both clerical and lay, are very numerous in all the Provinces of Upper and Central India except, perhaps, in Bengal—the quaker-like spirit of the sect, their abhorrence of all

violence, their regard for truth, and the unobtrusiveness of their opinions, render them very inoffensive members of the State—their mendicants also never solicit alms and in this capacity even they are less obnoxious than the many religious vagrants whom the rank soil of Hindu superstition and the enervating operation of an Indian climate so plentifully engender.



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